Synopsis

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Engagement in History in Seamus Heaney's Poetry

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The present doctoral research project intends to analyze engagement in history in the poetry of one of the most distinguished Irish poet-Seamus Heaney (1939- 2013) and to explore the cultural and historical implications in the poetry of Seamus Heaney. He achieved the high recognition in the poetic fields when he was chosen for the Nobel Prize in 1995, the chief reason for which is that he has given a very faithful account of the sufferings of the Irish Catholics. The research project intends to analyse the poetry from the perspective of new historicism: a method based on the parallel reading of literary and non- literary texts. Thus, the text (poetry) and the co-text (Irish history) are seen as expressions of the same historical moment, and interpreted accordingly. A summary of the chapters of the thesis is as follows:

Chapter 1. Introduction: Modern Poetry in English and Irish contexts

The social change and political turmoil in Ireland and across Europe of the Revival period has had a very deep impact on the Irish literature of twentieth century. Some key formal and aesthetic modes, social concerns and representational challenges of Irish literature in the twentieth century are required to be explored to trace out the literary ferment in which Seamus Heaney emerged as the leading Irish poet.

With no immediate literary past to be reckoned with, by the end of the nineteenth century writers in Ireland were on the defensive against the recent literary past and on the lookout for new premises and methods, seeking to establish a distinct identity of their own. At this time, the Irish Literary Revival, also called the Irish Literary Renaissance and nicknamed the Celtic Twilight - a flowering of Irish literary talent in the late 19th and early 20th century, took place. The differing interpretative lenses used to interpret the literature of the Revival have been addressed. The critics such as Declan Kiberd, Seamus Deane, David Lloyd, Edna Langley, Roy Foster, Fredric Jameson and Edward Said have been discussed. The contemporary Irish Studies have been assessed and their attitudes to the Northern Irish and Irish Republic States have been examined. The writing after partition is deployed to endorse or refute attitudes to culture, the state and society. In contrast to the still fluid and literally stateless energies of the Revival, the post- partition period instigated concrete state formations in both the Free state and the North so that literature, culture, ideology and both Nationalist and Unionist rhetoric had more palpable terms of reference. Literature and Criticism found itself at odds with the two states brought into being by partition and contemporary Irish studies. There were many women participants in the

Irish nationalist and Republican agitations of the Revival period, most famously Maud Gonne (1866- 1953), Countess Markievicz (1868- 1927), Carol Coulter, Edna Longley and Henna Sheehy- Skeffington (1877- 1946). There were highly divergent views as to whether nationalism and feminism shared the same contemporary agenda, whether feminism was an equalizing pre-requisite to nationalism or whether national liberation must come first and then facilitate the emancipation of women once the national question had been resolved. Along with the Celtic Tiger, which refers to the economy of the Republic of Ireland between 1995 and 2000- a period of rapid real economic growth fuelled by foreign direct investment, a whole range of much more subterranean voices emerged restively at odds with the supposed economic successes of a new globalizing Ireland and anxious to undercut the mythic past and the sacrosanct narrative of the nation. Thus, across the literature and criticism that have been covered, there are clear interstices where tradition and modernity collide and older forms of culture and identity blunt newer patterns. The violence in the current phase of the Troubles in the North, which began in the mid-1960s with a series of Loyalist murders and attacks and escalated around 1969 with the arrival of British troops and the formation of the Provisional IRA, places enormous pressure on writing and culture to respond, articulate or resolve. Seamus Heaney's work comprises one of the most sensitive as well as controversial efforts to deal with the pressures of contemporary Northern society. Being criticized by some Nationalists for not voicing their concerns enough yet he was threatened by Loyalists and consequently left the North for the Republic in the 1970s due to death threats. Heaney's poetry is highly charged with both a need for artistic freedom and an obligation to find an imaginative means of responding to the conflict in the North.

New Historicism, in place of dealing with a text in isolation from its literary context, attends primarily to the historical and cultural conditions of its production, its meanings and its effects and also of its later critical interpretations and evaluations. Thus, the new historicists like Stephan Greenblatt and Michel Foucault conceive of a text as "situated" within the totality of the institutions, social practices, and discourses that constitute the culture of a particular time and place, and with which the literary text interacts as both a product and a producer of cultural energies and codes. The history of Irish people, which was the history of periodic, unsuccessful revolts and the sad fate of the people of Ireland, has greatly inspired Seamus Heaney to write poetry. At the same time, his poetry also becomes an important historical document as it records the historical moments very significantly.

Hypothesis:

As Louis Montrose has suggested in his essay '*A Midsummer Night's Dream* and the shaping fantasies of Elizabethan Culture: Gender, Power and Form', the play creates the culture by which it is created, and shapes fantasies by which it is shaped. Thus, it is not just the history that stimulates the poetry; also the poetry helps the readers to understand the history better. Thus, history and poetry can be explored together. The present research would follow new historicism in reading literary and non-literary texts together, with its combined interest in 'the textuality of history and the historicity of texts.' It assumes to look at Seamus Heaney's poetry as an alternative historical document.

Limitations:

The research project has restricted itself to the poetry of Seamus Heaney. The project does not interpret other poems of the same period.It has tried to explore into the field of poetry and no other literary form such as novel, drama or short story has been used for the research.

Chapter 2. Seamus Heaney's Poetry: themes and forms

The second chapter discusses the poetic journey, the influences that inspired Seamus Heaney to write poetry, the themes in his poems, the form that he usually adopts and the language he uses in his poems.

Born on a farm called Mossbawn, Seamus Justin Heaney's (1939- 2013) childhood has repeatedly been referred to in his poems. The background of the writings reinforces a sense of intimate domestic warmth and affection as its prevailing atmosphere. The liturgical and popular forms of the religion: the Mass, confessions, the family rosary, the recitation of the catechism and the numerous pieties of a now virtually extinct phase of Irish Catholicism- all these figure repeatedly in his poetry. His childhood, education, job, career and impact of the current political circumstances on him have been discussed in detail. Heaney is the author of twelve collections of poetry, including *Death of a Naturalist* (1966), *Door into the Dark* (1969), *Wintering Out* (1972), *North* (1975), *Field Work* (1979), *Sweeney Astray* (1984), *Station Island* (1985), *The Haw Lantern* (1987), *Seeing Things* (1991) and *The Spirit Level* (1996). His prose has been collected in three books: *Preoccupations* (1980), *The Government of the Tongue* (1989) and *The*

Redress of Poetry (1995). His works also include a version of Sophocles' *Philoctetes, The Cure at Troy* (1990) and a translation, with Stanislaw Baranczak, of Jan Kochanowski's *Laments* (1995). Despite his stellar status - in addition to the Nobel, he won, among other awards, the Whitbread Prize (three times), the David Cohen prize for a lifetime's achievement in literature, and the Forward Poetry Prize (for his final collection, Human Chain).

The currents and cross-currents of the multi-farious influences that went into the making of the poetic personality of Heaney as a poet have also been examined at length. Various factors and personalities of life have been influential in his growth as a poet: the sectarian conflicts, the difference of treatment between the Protestants and Catholics, his childhood experiences, his parents and their activities- especially farming, his teacher McLaverty, Kavanagh- the great Irish poet and his poetic works, other important figures- Terry P. Flanagan and Marie Devlin- who later became Marie Heaney, certain Protestant friends including Michael Longley, his wife Edna Longley and David Hammond and the great classical poets Dante and W. B. Yeats.

Some of the most common of themes that can be found in poetry include a large amount of history and language, the connections that are present between personal choices, nature, childhood experiences and man-woman relationships. The history of Ireland is full of the deep echoes of agony of the people who were suppressed, depressed and exploited by the British colonizers. Poem after poem opens door into the dark shades of Irish history and sufferings which the poet recreates in order to assert in front of the world that the great human slogans about freedom of faith and independence of living are still a wasteful cries when the total story of Irish people is explored. Though chief concern of the poet is to portray the insufficiency of human treatment meted out to the Irish people, the poetry is full of the images and symbols picked up from the common habits and common attitude of the Irish men and women in their day today living. Often metaphors, similes and symbols from the sexual experiences of both male and female responses have been picked up. The catalogues of Irish habits, rituals and physical features of human figures have been introduced to develop symbols out of them. Thus, the poetry becomes instrumental in visualising the images and pictures of Irish political turmoil and creates history instead of just taking it as a background.

While themes have an Irish perspective, the form shows Heaney to be part of the tradition of English poetry, informed in particular by the work of poets like Wordsworth and Larkin. The

style is unique that subtly refers to all times and places, the tone is usually mild and serene; making the existential themes all the more intense. The poems are crafted with an extremely keen ear, which manages to bring the sound of the outside onto the printed page. Figurative language is also one of the important techniques used to create powerful images. The poet seems not just rural, sturdy, domestic and sensuous writer, with his feet planted firmly in the Irish mud, but is ornamentalist and a word collector. One can conclude that in selection of language, form and style, and subject, history with its crucial episodes has been most instrumental.

Chapter 3. Rural Traditions of Ireland: *Death of a Naturalist* (1966) and *door into the Dark*(1969).

Deriving their primary material from the poet's early life and rural background, *Death of a Naturalist* (1966) and *Door into the Dark* (1969) are the first two poetic volumes and can be appropriately put under the general heading of the 'early work of Heaney'

New Historicism refuses to privilege the literary text: instead of a literary foreground and a historical background, it envisages and practices a mode of study in which literary and non-literary texts are given equal weight and constantly inform or interrogate with each other. Every activity that a poet observes is important in the formation of his poetic text; and at the same time, every poem also plays an important role to understand the culture and history of the poet's time. A New Historicist looks at literature in a wider historical context, examining both how the writer's times affected the work and how the work helps to understand the writer's times better. The first two poetic collections convey the observations and the memories of early rural poetic experiences in a language of great sensuous richness and directness. These poetic versions offer an alternative history of the rural Ireland.

3.1 *Death of a Naturalist*

Death of a Naturalist (1966), first major published volume, makes a very serious attempt to project an exact image of what the poet felt and experienced in his own circumstances at the grass root level. By picking up symbols from the experiences of childhood, it reconstructs a comprehensive image of the Irish people living in Ulster region, a community of minority Catholics engaged in homely activities like farming, digging, churning, etc. without much caring for attaining higher stations of life in political fields or in economic framework of the industrialized society.

The poems like ‘The Diviner’ and ‘Digging’ discover analogy for the art of poetry. The poet’s adolescent realization that Nature, far from being innocent and idyllic, has a dark and disturbing side and a child’s unhappy recognition of the laws of mutability is very well recorded in some of the most celebrated poems from this collection such as ‘Blackberry Picking’, ‘Death of a Naturalist’, ‘Blackberry Picking’ and ‘The Barn’. Some of the purely and intensely autobiographical poems are also there in this collection: the most touching among which is ‘Mid-Term Break’. The end of *Death of a Naturalist* introduces love lyrics, which imply the adult’s progression towards full sexual maturity and adulthood. As this collection is devoted to Heaney’s wife Marie Heaney, all these poems depict his personal love and care for his wife. The poems like ‘At a Potato Digging’ and ‘For the Commander of Eliza’ ponder over the history of Ireland. The rural and agricultural images and symbolism present the agony of the Irish Catholics in Irish history.

3.2. *Door into the Dark*

While *Death of a Naturalist* persistently associates darkness with adolescent fears of sex and death, *Door into the Dark*, faces up to the darkness with grim determination. This anthology is persistently concerned with the country matters- with farming, fishing, thatching, forging; but light and darkness, which were used to refer to the fear in the heart of a young boy, now are associated with speech and writing, forgetting and remembering, expiration and inspiration, blindness and insight, destruction and creation. Also in this collection, Heaney not only continues to explore the material from his upbringing, but also expands the range and develops new moral insights.

Some of the poems in the volume, especially ‘The Forge’ and ‘Thatcher’ are similar to the major kinds in *Death of a Naturalist*, whereas the others, particularly the concluding ‘Bogland’, are the origin, and are initiative of the sequence of ‘bog poems’ in *Wintering Out*. The homely lady with Irish background is visually presented before us by Heaney in ‘The Wife’s Tale’ and ‘Mother’. All such poems comment on the rural ways and customs of life; and thus create a picture of the rural history of Ireland. This picture helps the readers to understand the history and the factors affecting the history.

Many poems such as ‘The Penisula’, ‘Night Drive’, ‘Shoreline’ and ‘St Ardboe Point’ seem simply to be musings on travels in Ireland and on the continent. But actually these meditations, simple, undramatic in language and quiet in tone, are significant in the evolution of the poet’s poetic orientation, as they record his growing awareness of place as a determinant of sensibility. The inescapable presence of the past emerges in the poems like ‘Requiem for the Croppiers’ and ‘A Lough Neagh Sequence’. ‘The Wife’s Tale’ and ‘Undine’ talk about the mutuality and inter-dependence of men and women.

To conclude, the country poems of these two collections have made Heaney favourite of many of his late-21st-century anxious readers. These poems seek to understand the deprivation of the Irish people in more fundamental way by digging the past, through the mode of memory, instead of being satisfied with the momentary details of conventional history and politics, a kind of poetic archeology.

Chapter 4. Responding to the “Troubles”: *Wintering Out* (1973) and *North* (1975).

The violence in Ireland reached to the highest point on January 30, 1972, when British armies fired on the Irish Catholics, killing fourteen and wounding another fourteen, known as ‘Bloody Sunday’. This was the context in which Heaney was moved to write poems for his collection *Wintering Out*. Apart from addressing the context out of which the conflict sprang, *Wintering Out* prepares a platform promising the satisfying future work in *North*.

4.1 *Wintering Out*

Wintering out derives itself from a phrase used to suggest a period of hunkering down through the months of brutally cold weather in anticipation of the spring to come. The poems in *Wintering Out* more straightforwardly confront the Northern violence after 1969, what came to be known as ‘The Troubles’- a seminal period in the northern Irish history in terms of the increase in rage among the region’s Catholics under British/ Protestant control, and the corresponding suppression of anti- Protestant demonstrations of British troops.

Wintering Out was published in 1972, a terrible year for Northern Ireland. The year of Bloody Sunday, for sure, but that was just the culmination of a spiral of terrible events. While next collection, published in 1975, is called *North* (the politics become explicit, overt, from top

to bottom, in that one), it is in *Wintering Out* that the poet started directly addressing what was happening in his country. History is not a nightmare or just something written by the historians. These poems suggest that it is something to be reclaimed. While being rooted deeply in the rural imagery, they comment on the history of Ireland.

Christianity and Christian allusion feature in major poems such as 'The Last Mummer', 'Gifts of Rain', 'The Other Side', 'A Northern Hoard', 'The Tollund Man', 'Summer Home', 'Limbo', 'Bye-Child' and 'Westering'. The poet's nostalgia for the rural family background, secular education and the psychological-spiritual trauma of the Troubles are suggested by his fondness for the pieties of the Mossbawn childhood. The collection is full of highly rich and charged language, with religious metaphors and allusions. While the first two collections deal with the strong theme of loss: a lost time, a lost childhood, a lost intimacy with the natural world, personal loss, dying rural crafts and loss of language, the third collection explores the power of language. *Wintering Out* explores a sense of place- in the pronunciation of local names, hears Irish words and sounds in the Irish landscape, links past historical events of Ireland with present violence of Troubles, showing how conflict rises again and again with the same tribal, primitive emotions and explores a sense of insecurity and anxiety in close human relationships, particularly marriage. Most importantly, WO explores the peat bog and its preservative qualities which store layers of history- keeping history alive, just as poetry does. Instead of producing instant, journalistic verse in a knee jerk reaction to the latest political development in Ireland, *Wintering Out* Responds to it in a bleak and pessimistic tone.

4.2. *NORTH*

The first of Heaney's works that directly dealt with the Troubles in Northern Ireland, *North*, first published by Faber and Faber in 1975, looks frequently to the past for images and symbols relevant to the violence and political unrest of that time. This anthology attempts to provide a transparent window on the Irish past and present. To lay bare the past, it borrows imagery from archaeology, linguistics and anthropology. The mythical versions in this collection set the contemporary Irish history, especially the violent campaigns of the I.R.A., against the background of the early Iron Age.

As the title of *North* suggests, all the poems in this volume focus on the poet's Ulster experiences. *North* begins with two dedicatory poems to the poet's aunt Mary Heaney, and is divided later into two parts: the first part made up of 39 individual poems under 18 titles and second part made up of 12 poems with 4 main titles and 6 sub-titles. Part-I focuses on the 'North' of northern Europe from the time of its first population to the present. The poems of this part use taut, unrhymed or off-rhymed quatrain developed for *Wintering Out*, formal and archaic diction and solemn and austere atmosphere. *North* is very remarkable for the bog poems it contains. The tradition of these bog poems, as started in the earlier collection, reaches to its climax with some of the most remarkable poems of this volume. The inspiration of these poems was the bog bodies, who were either victims of sacrificial rituals or they were punished by death for crimes. The poems as an act of compensation give them a literary space. The bog bodies are resurrected and made to speak. Now getting back their dignity and their voices, they can tell their story to the whole world. 'The Grauballe Man', 'The Bog Queen', the Windeby girl of 'Punishment' and the girl of 'Come to the Bower', all these return from the Iron Age to share truths with the whole world. The bog bodies might have been static in the descriptions and photographs, but they come to life in poetry of *North*. These poems elicit the shame and horror but they also suggest the peaceful and non-violent ways of reforming society. Other poems with historical references are featured throughout *North*, half- known just from looking at the titles: 'Act of Union'- which compares the signing away of the country with the violation of a female and 'Ocean's Love to Ireland', in which the celebrated courtier of the court of Queen Elizabeth is presented as a rapist who makes advances towards a maid of honour.

Part II deals with the contemporary verse, using standard pentametric rhymed quatrain and informal and playful diction and tone. Prefaced with the lines from Wordsworth's *The Prelude* and W.B Yeats's *Autobiographies*, the second section of *North* was an attempt at some kind of declarative voice as in the poems like 'Whatever You Say, Say Nothing' and 'Summer 1969'. Recollections and remembrances are an integral part of poems in part II of *North*. The poetry has a special function and it has been used to deconstruct, decolonize and dismantle the hegemonies.

It can be concluded that despite the tremendous difference of voice between Part I and Part II, there is an underlying unity of subject — in both sections the poet reveals his complex

attitude to Northern Ireland, his doubts and his feelings of remorse. The poems of Part I are involved with reaching back to origins and with parallel historical developments which might help in understanding the Ulster problems. In Part II, in a declarative voice the divided society of Protestants and Catholics who do not speak in general is recounted.

Between the publications of *Death of a Naturalist* in 1966 and *North* in 1975, a notion of happy and a well integrated state called Northern Ireland proved a myth, as Ireland witnessed increasingly violent confrontation between Nationalists and Republicans, Protestants and Catholics. The poems in *Wintering Out* and *North* explore a number of intriguing and mysterious themes such as the national and cultural past of his homeland, life-death, gender, land and myths; bringing about a unique vision of Ireland's rich and bloody history. It is important to know and understand the complex relationship between past and present of Ireland to comprehend the poems of *Wintering out* and *North* as the poet's response to the Troubles.

Chapter 5. History in Language: *Station Island*(1984) and the *Haw Lantern*(1987).

The happenings and experiences of his life, change in the political scenario in Ireland, his own growth as a poet and an important public figure and his demand from himself to take a stand in the politics- all these factors have brought a change in Heaney's perspective- which is clearly evident in both' *Station Island* and *Haw Lantern.*

5.1 *Station Island*

Dedicated to fellow Irish playwright and short story writer- Brian Friel, this collection is divided in three parts: the first section made up of individual lyrics dealing with the memories and happenings of the everyday life; the second section- the title sequence itself narrating a series of visionary encounters with the dead; and the third section- named as 'Sweeney Redivivus' is dominated by the seventh-century king transformed into a bird in the medieval Irish poem *Buile Suibhne* which Heaney has translated as *Sweeney Astray*.

While the individual lyrics of the first part are drawn from ordinary life, many poems bring out the inner conflict in the mind of the poet and guilt for being unable to do anything when Irish people were facing 'Troubles'. Their overall tone hints that changes are afoot. The first part comprises 41 poems under 25 main titles. The second part 'Station Island' comprises of

12 sequences of poems written while on pilgrimage to Station Island. During this pilgrimage, the narrator meets the various ghosts, who have been, either personally known friends and acquaintances, or writers known from their work; and the poet's conversations with them are either on the living of a proper life or on the production of significant art. The pilgrimage suggests faith in the collective historical experience and the final realization of 'freedom' suggests the recognition of the emerging voice. In the 'Sweeney Redivivus' Sweeney's voice has been selected to demonstrate the need for change in the present situation and Heaney's attitude to religion and politics.

Throughout the pilgrimage, the narrator is torn between two contradictory commands: to be faithful to the collective historical experience and to be true to the recognitions of the emerging self. Out of these commands one has to choose the right one for himself, in which James Joyce becomes his master and mentor.

5.2. *Haw Lantern*

The title of the collection *The Haw Lantern* refers to the haw fruit. The fruit is an important symbol of defiance against winter- a symbol of the dignity of the Northern Irish in the face of violence and trouble, and offering a small piece of light and hope in the darkness. The image of the lantern evoked by the title is a reference to the traditional account of the Greek cynic philosopher Diogenes of Sinope, who carried a lantern through the streets in search of an honest man in the light. The implication is that there is little hope of finding an honest man, especially in the dire political situation in Northern Ireland at that time.

Following *North*, *Field Work* and *Station Island*, *The Haw Lantern* looks slender, probably because it is deliberately impersonal. Yet the volume offers some of the most spirited and intense of Heaney's poems- 'Hailstones', 'Grotus and Coventina', 'Holding Course' and 'Clearances'. Along with these tender, intimate and erotic poems, the collection has been embellished with parables, allegories and satires on the social, political and religious aspects of Irish life. These strategies have been deployed to define the marginal status of Northern Ireland as within the colonial divisions created by the rules of the British Empire and the Protestant church.

Many poems in the collection such as ‘The Haw Lantern’, ‘Grotus and Conventina’, ‘The Stone Verdict’ and ‘A Daylight Art’ bristle with classical references. Certain poems bring out Heaney’s sense of nationalism in varied colours. An Irishman’s nostalgia for the lost Ireland, his yearning for the bright and colourful state of Irish people and his anxiety for peace and harmony in the nation have been very well reflected in the poems. Several of the poems in *The Haw Lantern* explore themes of mortality and loss inspired by the death of the poet’s loved ones. Besides the political parables mentioned, *The Haw Lantern* contains several notable elegies, among them a sequence of eight sonnets (“Clearances”) and ‘The Stone Verdict’ are the most noteworthy.

While *Station Island* is an autobiographical quest demonstrating development of Heaney as a poet, the poetry in *The Haw Lantern* has been used as a medium to provide compromises and compensations, to repair the fractured identity of Irish people.

6. Enlargement of History: *The Spirit Level* (1996) and *District and Circle* (2006).

While *The Spirit Level* and *District and Circle* continue to explore humanism, politics and nature; after thirty years struggle with the political and the historical conflicts in Ireland, the poetry now encounters the world history with its focus on terrorist attacks and globalization. A new freedom and enlargement very clearly can be noticed in the new vision of these poems.

6.1 *The Spirit Level*

The Spirit Level is the first anthology Heaney published after winning the noble prize in literature in 1995, and ‘an irresistibly coherent book which celebrates the rising and the raising of the human spirit’ according to *The Times*. (Cover page of *The Spirit Level*.) As New Historicism suggests, history should be reinterpreted along with the text and *The Spirit Level* reveals how simple things, such as a thimble or a swing, can hold the weight of history-and how history can alter the emotional weight of an object. These objects have been used to present a new way of looking at history and of reconstructing it.

The title of the book refers to a carpenter's level, which tells whether a surface is perfectly horizontal or vertical. Accordingly, *The Spirit Level* has much to say about balance and equilibrium. Certain central poems in the volume directly explore the conflicts of Northern

Ireland: “The Flight Path” extensively tells the story of Heaney’s encounter with an Irish nationalist while on a train for Belfast and directly asks Heaney “When, for fuck’s sake, are you going to write / Something for us?” (SL- 25) ‘Damson’, remembering the damson stain on the bricklayer’s bloodied hand in an accident, introduces Odyssean figure in Hades encountering the local ‘Ghosts with their tongues out for a lick of blood’ (SL-16) pointing out to the ghastly figures of the violently dead victims of Northern Irish political history. The lengthy sequence of ‘Mycenae Lookout’ also very well brings out the influence of the contemporary violence on his poetry. In this revelation of present out of the heaviness of the past the poet also releases certain strong emotions: anger, impatience and desperation. These poems find thereby Heaney’s own self as a poet who has himself, throughout his career, been drawn to comment on, and has withdrawn from propagandistic involvement in, a lengthy, ongoing, local internecine war. “Whitby-sur-Moyola”, ‘Postscript’, and ‘At the Wellhead’ depict the poet’s own personal experience playing an equal role in the depiction of history.

The collection overall shows transfer in the poet’s mood: the aggressive temperament of the young man is now replaced by the patient and peaceful mindset of a matured old man. While history continues to be an important guiding force to poetry, a change in the mood of the poet as well as the Irish people has been suggested in this anthology. While ‘The Tollund Man’ in *Wintering Out* discovers an analogy between Glob’s bog-bodies and the victims of Irish political violence, ‘Tollund’ in *The Spirit Level* becomes a poem of optimism: ‘Things had moved on.’ (SL- 69)

6.2. *District and Circle*

Twelfth collection since *Death of a Naturalist* (1966), *District and Circle* was published in April 2006 by Faber and Faber. The collection is made up of 44 titles including 5 sequences of more than one poem; 68 poems in all. Also some ‘found prose’ and a number of translations are included in the volume. Many of the poems in the collection are sonnets in spirit if not always in form, as volta is present in them. Significant world events such as terrorist attack on September 11th 2001 on World Trade Centre in New York and London Transport hit by terrorist bombers including radicalized nationals in 2005 have prompted the sensitive poet to express his anguish in the poems like ‘Shiver’, ‘Anything can happen’, ‘Helmet’ and ‘District and Circle’. Many warnings given by the scientists regarding global warming after 1965 have been referred to in the

poems like ‘In Iowa’, ‘Hofn’ and ‘Moyolla’. Irish background and Catholic upbringing inspire the poems celebrating the familiar spots in the pieces like ‘The Lagans Road’, ‘The Blackbird of Glanmore’ and resurrecting the dead figures in ‘Home Help’. Though time has changed and tensions have diminished, IRA cessation of hostilities, so-called ‘decommissioning’ of weaponry stuttering attempts at Power-Sharing offer pause if not closure; two poems ‘The Link’ and ‘The Nod’ refer to the suspicion and the hidden threat with which the local community was perceived. The anthology also pays tribute to a long list of fellow poets who share with Heaney similarities of interest, poetry that marries the political and the lyrical and Nobel laureates. Auden, Cavafy, Hughes, Milosz, Rilke, Seferis, Dorothy and William Wordworth are among these poets.

Heaney’s intimate knowledge of classical languages and his deep interest in the mythological references are revealed in ‘Anything Can Happen’. Also the Tollund Man reappears in a new guise in ‘The Tollund Man in Springtime’ exploring the tensions between the pure past and the destructive future. ‘A Hagging Match’, ‘Tate’s Avenue’ and ‘Birch Grove’ deal with Heaney’s insight into his relationship with his wife. And lastly, there are also poems dealing with poetic process such as ‘In a Loaning’, ‘A Shiver’, ‘Out of This World’, ‘Rilke: After the Fire’ and ‘Rilke: The Apple Orchard’.

Heaney, the apprentice-poet in the first collection in 1960, now after 65 years in 2006 is at ripeness in *District and Circle*. The privileged Secondary education, his schooldays, his awareness of languages and literature feature strongly in *District and Circle*. In the early 60s Heaney was in need of friends and mentors to share his interests in the creative arts and to help him along the way; by 2006 due to reputation as an accomplished Irish poet, good nature and optimism, Heaney can enjoy a long list of friends and people, whom he dedicates his poems.

In the mood of valedictory, Heaney as a sixty years experienced poet writes with a new freedom and engagement in *The Spirit Level* and *District and Circle*. His new poetic vision is by no means entirely pessimistic. As Ireland is no longer the country he knew as a young man, he derives a welcome stimulus to his continuing creativity from the transformation of the world. The perspective now becomes reverential, otherworldly, and affirmative.

7. Conclusion: Reflection on history in Seamus Heaney's poetical works.

As new historicism implies, the world of past is available only in the world of past. So it is treacherous to reconstruct the past as it really was- rather than as we have been conditioned by our own place and time to believe that it was. H. Aram Veeser, introducing an anthology of essays, *The New Historicism* (1989), noted some key assumptions such as every human action is actually the effect of a network of material practices and literary and non-literary "texts" are equally valuable. Michel Foucault, the French philosophical historian, also refused to see history as an evolutionary process, rather a continuous development from cause to effect, from past to present toward the end, a moment of definite closure, a day of judgment. No historical event, according to Foucault, has a single cause; rather each event is tied into a vast web of economic, social and political factors. Literature therefore becomes a medium to realize these multidimensional factors of history and to discover the historicity of the text. It helps the reader to understand the history better and with more understanding. Therefore, it can be said that the poetry of Seamus Heaney not only registers the Irish history but is in itself an alternative history of Irish movement. So the purpose of the research project is to examine all the poetry collections of Seamus Heaney and to know what kind of knowledge at social, political, economic, religious level it created. The project also attempted to explore the extent to which history is reflected in the poetry and to look at the poetry itself as an important document depicting the history of Ireland.

The history of Ireland is full of the deep echoes of agony of the people who were suppressed, depressed and exploited by the British colonizers. Conquered by Britain during the Norman times, Ireland's political organisation was disunited. King Henry VIII converted the Roman Catholic Church of England into Anglican Church under Protestant leadership in 16th century. Now as Ireland was governed by the British forces directly, the story of brutality, repression and suppression of the Irish people began. The brutalities of the cruel forces of England reached its highest point during the times of Oliver Cromwell. The Catholic community having an ancient glory of native traditions was treated inhumanly and the entire political voice of the Irish people was being crushed during the time of Cromwell. When the act of union was passed in 1800, the independence of Irish people was further bowed. Their parliament in Dublin was abolished and Ireland was now directly under the British rule. The bulk of Irish Catholics lived in conditions of poverty and insecurity. Not only this,

while the Irish people, still struggling to achieve solidarity of their own against the inhuman clutches of the British, also suffered heavily from the ethnic violence between the two factions of their own- Irish Protestants and Irish Catholics. Moreover, they were badly hit by the natural calamity of the Great Famine between 1845- 50. The combined forces of famine, disease and emigration depopulated the island; Ireland's population dropped from 8 million before the famine to 5 million. The movements of the Irish people in 20th century suffered a setback due to the larger crises of Great Britain during the First World War and the Second World War. However, in 1916, the militant Republicans staged uprising, proclaiming Ireland a republic and declared that the link with Britain was henceforth severed. To crush these attempts, the British killed the leaders in a series of executions. In 1969, the British troops were deployed in the streets of Northern Ireland following the activities of IRA (Irish Republican Army). The violence that erupted in 1971 and 1972 confirmed the ill fate of the Irish people, particularly the people of Ulster- the region to which our poet Seamus Heaney belongs. Several talks were arranged between the Prime Ministers of the Free states and the British Prime Minister in order to solve the problem of Ireland but no unanimous solution for political settlement was brought. Finally, the two governments established an International body to provide an independent assessment of the decommissioning issue to see all arms removed from Irish politics.

However, the Ulster people still continued to suffer from agonising pains which was most likely to draw the attention of the serious thinker and literary artist like Seamus Heaney. His poem after poem opens door into the dark shades of Irish history and sufferings which is recreated in the poem in order to assert in front of the world that the great human slogans about freedom of faith and independence of living are still a wasteful cries when the total story of Irish people is explored. The poetry itself is so keen in its demonstration of the Irish history that it seems to shape the history for the readers.

History of Ireland was a history of the Catholics who suffered at the hands of Protestants. The initial poetic volumes *Death of a Naturalist* and *Door into the Dark* make a very serious attempt to project the correct image of the innermost feelings of the minority Catholics. Born into an Ulster Catholic family full of Catholic devotion and worship in a local community that included both Catholics and Protestants, Heaney was exposed to the customs and practices of the organized church from childhood. Throughout his career, Heaney has written a number of poems

proving the love, respect and pride he felt towards his parents, his wider family, towards Ireland and the landscapes of his upbringing.

The symbols picked up from the experiences of childhood reconstruct a complete image of the Irish people living in Ulster region, a community of minority Catholics engaged in homely activities like farming, digging, churning etc. This clearly indicates that the chief concern of the poetry is with the Irish background and its reality. The basic purpose behind interweaving the pastoral images of nature and agricultural activities like ploughing, churning, digging, spade handling, shovel working, potato heaps and alcoholic smells due to their staling seems to present the internal picture of the Irish people by finding a coherence between the inner feelings and outer atmosphere. The images and symbolism from agrarian life and natural background have been used as an effective tool to suggest the psychological sadistic reality of the Irish people.

Ethnic violence in Ireland, sectarian conflict and unnecessary prejudices that resulted in the unspeakable human tragedy depicting the political history are portrayed in *Wintering Out*. The poems of *North*, which is considered to be one of the most concerted efforts to interpret the tragic history of Ulster, attempt to unearth the historic agony of the people who suffered under unfortunate conditions. One who recognizes the allusions, intertexts and analogies in Heaney's work will definitely agree with his learnedness in mythical dimensions. Many poems, especially in *Station Island* and *The Haw Lantern* bristle with classical references. Apart from dealing with the childhood emotions, people and spots, *The Spirit Level* and *District and Circle* deal with certain new elements such as the Millennium 2000 and celebrations associated with it, terrorist attacks and warning that Earth itself is under threat. Thus, depiction of history is not confined within Ireland, it incorporates the world history.

New historicism approaches history as represented and recorded in written documents, in history-as-text. Historical facts are, therefore, irrecoverably lost. This means that the actual thoughts, or feelings, or intentions of a writers can never be recovered or reconstructed, so that the real individual is now entirely superseded by the literary text which has come down to us. Therefore, the poetry, which is the word of past, replaces history, which is the world of past. In this sense, text is history. From the new historicist point of view, Seamus Heaney's poetry represents an alternative history of Irish past. Further, the Irish past is resituated in Heaney's poetry. The present research project constitutes another making, it studies the representation of

Irish history in Seamus Heaney's poetry. So the history is not just taken as background to understand poetry, history is 'done' or 'created' or 'shaped' by the poetry.

Scope for further study:

As the present project focuses only on the poetry of Seamus Heaney, the other important modern Irish poets such as Michael Longley (born 1939), David Wheatley (born 1970) and Sinéad Morrissey (born 1972) can be examined for the further research. Also the present research project exclusively tries to throw light on the engagement in history in poetry, and no other literary form such as novel, drama or short story has been analysed here. These literary forms can be explored for further study.

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